

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR NIACT IMMEDIATE

USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 234457 TOSEC 270515

SAN SALVADOR FROM LUERS FOR SHLAUDEMAN ONLY

FOLLOWING REPEAT SANTIAGO 9212 ACTION SECSTATE DTD 21 SEP 76.

QTE: S E C R E T SANTIAGO 9212

EO 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PINR, PINS, PINT, CI

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF ORLANDO LETELIER

REF: LUERS-POPPER TELCON, SEPTEMBER 21

1. I APPRECIATE PROMPT ADVICE TO US CONCERNING BOMBING OF EX-GOC FONMIN LETELIER AND HIS TWO COMPANIONS. DETAILS ARE FILTERING IN FROM WASHINGTON, INCLUDING SENATOR ABOUREZK'S STATEMENT ATTRIBUTING RESPONSIBILITY TO "CHILEAN TYRANNY". AS OF 1500 HOURS LOCAL, GOC HAS MAINTAINED PUBLIC SILENCE.

2. DEPARTMENT WILL BE BETTER ABLE THAN WE ARE TO ESTIMATE THE EXTENT OF THE ADVERSE EFFECT OF THIS OUTRAGE ON THE JUNTA'S POSITION IN THE UNITED STATES. WE ARE SURE THERE WILL BE A VERBAL OUTBURST, AND NOTE THAT THE ASSASSINATION COULD NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER TIMED TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE

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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY NOW CONVENING IN NEW YORK.

WE WOULD GUESS THAT THE GOC WOULD HASTEN TO DENY ALL RESPONSIBILITY. IT MAY WELL SUGGEST THE AFFAIR IS A LEFTIST PROVOCATION DESIGNED TO HURT THE GOC. THIS IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE, BUT IS UNLIKELY TO BE WIDELY ACCEPTED IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY CONFIRMING EVIDENCE.

3. WE RECALL TWO PREVIOUS INSTANCES IN WHICH JUNTA OPPONENTS WERE MYSTERIOUSLY ATTACKED: THE CASE OF GENERAL CARLOS PRATS, KILLED IN BUENOS AIRES IN SEPTEMBER 1974, AND THE CASE OF BERNARDO LEIGHTON, SERIOUSLY WOUNDED IN ROME IN OCTOBER 1975. IN BOTH CASES, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, INVESTIGATION AS TO THE PERPETRATORS PROVED FRUITLESS. THE ATTACK ON GENERAL ALFREDO CANALES, THE JUNTA'S AMBASSADOR IN BEIRUT IN JULY 1974 HAS REMAINED EQUALLY MYSTERIOUS.

4. BASED ON OBVIOUS MOTIVATION, SUSPICION WILL FALL FIRST OF ALL ON THE GOC DIRECTORATE OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE (DINA). LETELIER WAS A FIRST-RANK POLITICAL FOE OF THE JUNTA. HE WAS POLITICALLY ACTIVE IN EXILE. SILENCING HIM WILL TEND TO INHIBIT SOME OTHER EXILES FROM SPEAKING, WRITING OR PLOTTING AGAINST THE JUNTA.

5. BUT WE HAVE NEVER HAD ANY INDICATION THAT DINA WAS IN ANY WAY OPERATIONAL IN U.S. TERRITORY, AND IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO BELIEVE THAT EVEN ITS RATHER FANATICAL LEADERS WOULD EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING IMPLICATED IN A TERRORIST ACT IN WASHINGTON. FURTHER, IF DINA HAD BEEN PLANNING TO KILL LETELIER AND IF PRESIDENT PINOCHET KNEW OF SUCH PLANS, IT SEEMS TO US UNLIKELY THAT THE CHILEANS WOULD HAVE PROMULGATED SO SHORTLY BEFORE THE CRIME THE DECREE DEPRIVING LETELIER OF HIS CHILEAN CITIZENSHIP.

6. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY IS THAT DINA OR OTHER GOC SOURCES COULD HAVE STIMULATED ACTION BY SOME RIGHTIST GROUP LOCATED OUTSIDE CHILE. WE HAVE IN MIND POSSIBLE COOPERATION BY SOUTHERN CONE GOVERNMENT SECURITY AUTHORITIES TO ELIMINATE ENEMIES ABROAD. WE HOPE OUR INTELLIGENCE EFFORTS IN OTHER CAPITALS WILL FOLLOW UP ON ANY INDICATIONS THAT SOUTHERN CONE GOVERNMENT INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES ARE ORGANIZING FOR TERRORISM OUTSIDE THE REGION.

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7. HERE IN THE EMBASSY WE ARE CONFINING OURSELVES TO REFERRING ALL INQUIRIES TO USG SPOKESMEN IN WASHINGTON. WE WILL BEEF UP OUR LOCAL SECURITY PRECAUTIONS AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY THAT AN ACTION-REACTION SYNDROME COULD TEMPORARILY MAKE US A TARGET FOR CHILEAN RESPONSE TO EMOTIONAL STATEMENTS FROM THE U.S.
POPPER

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